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07 May 2015

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Ward, Simon (2004) "Neues, altes Tor zur Welt" : the new central station in the 'new' Berlin.', in Berlin : the symphony continues : orchestrating architectural, social, and artistic change in Germany's new capital. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 77-92.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110906806.77>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Ward, Simon, "“Neues, altes Tor zur Welt”: The New Central Station in the “New” Berlin”; in: Costabile-Heming, Carol Anne, Halverson, Rachel J. and Foell, Kristie A. (eds.) of book, Berlin - The Symphony Continues: Orchestrating Architectural, Social, and Artistic Change in Germany's New Capital, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004, pp. 77-92.

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“Neues, altes Tor zur Welt”: The New Central Station in the “New” Berlin¹

The relationship between the railroad station and the urban environment in which it is located, and which it also helped to create, has been a permanently shifting one. According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the railroad “terminated that intimate relationship between the means of transport and its destination” that had existed with the stagecoach (171). Located outside the traditional city limits, it was, to begin with, an alien appendage. Nevertheless, as Hermann Glaser has observed, the railroad also radically altered the economic structure of the city. As the railroad station became an economic and communications’ center, it also began to develop its aesthetic aura (34). This aesthetic aura always existed in tension with its required high level of functionality, for, as many commentators have noted, the railroad station was a hybrid space (Schivelbusch 172). In terms of the spatial practice of those who passed through it, the railroad station was a gateway. Although the platforms were covered with steel and glass, the reception building that faced the city was made out of stone. By means of this two-facedness, the station’s function as a gateway found its architectural expression. Schivelbusch argues that this two-facedness reflected the railroad station’s function as a “stimulus shield” protecting the passenger who was confronted by two fundamentally different realms: city space and railroad space (175). The neoclassical character of these facades was, in this line of argument, an expression of the nineteenth-century desire to disguise the industrial aspect of buildings and processes through ornamentation.

The railroad station, as the most visible and most publicly accessible building of the industrial age, was also a building representative of the power of industrial capital. The oft-rehearsed cliché of the railroad station as the “cathedral of the nineteenth century” has its roots not only in the fact that, as the architectural historian Ulrich Krings argues, they were modeled on the structure of sacred buildings (63-4). It is also a clear indication of the shift in the organization of urban life that the railroads produced, the railroad station

1 “New. old gate to the world.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the authors.

representing the shift of power from the town hall, the market and the church towards industry, modernity and the circulation of capital. This is perhaps most strikingly illustrated in the relationship between Cologne Cathedral and the city's main railroad station (Kähler 205).

Within Germany, however, the railroad station of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a further representative function imposed by the architects and planners, as Krings has shown. Although the increasingly grand designs were originally an expression of the competition between the various privately-run rail companies, by 1907 Albert Hofmann, writing about the plans for Leipzig Main Station, was arguing that the design should not place the transport-technical issues in the foreground, but rather concentrate on the production of a "cultural monument" which would set the standard for "German culture" in the twentieth century (Krings 78-82). When we talk of the railroad station in Germany as a representative building, it must be remembered that its symbolic value lay not only in its status as an emblem of industrial progress and civilization but also in what it symbolized for the nation.

Berlin, like many other European capitals of the nineteenth century, did not possess one grand terminal, but a whole series of termini, each one belonging to the individual rail company whose line ended in the city. The building of the *Stadtbahn* in the 1880s began to solve the technical problems created through such commercial practices. However, within the context of a Berlin, which was to become the capital of the Wilhelmine Empire in 1871, railroad stations were one form of cultural expression of the *Gründerzeit*. On Julius Campe's Monumental Map of Berlin of 1896, alongside the various monuments and palaces of the era that decorate the border of the map, one also finds the railroad stations.

The *Lehrter Bahnhof*, completed in 1871, was one of the grand stations built in the eclectic historicist style of the period. I shall use it as an example for the symbolic significance of the railroad station in Berlin as it lay, for reasons that will become clear, on the site of the new central station, which is (still) in the middle of construction. That new station is almost always referred to as the new *Lehrter Bahnhof*, a peculiarity given that the name originates from the small town in Lower Saxony which was the destination for trains leaving Berlin from the station when it first opened. The name, now robbed of any significance, might be considered to be the only trace of the site's history that makes itself present in the new construction.

Although in some ways breaking with the traditions of railroad station construction in Berlin, as the architectural historian Ulrich Krings has argued, the *Lehrter Bahnhof* was nevertheless typical of its period (127-37).² It was, for

2 The station was chosen for the frontispiece of the 1896 edition of *Berlin und seine Eisenbahnen* (repr. Berlin: Verlag für Ästhetik und Kommunikation, 1982).

some twentieth-century critics, the worst expression of the eclectic historicism through which architects attempted to decorate (or mask) the iron construction, which, in raw form, the railroad station was. It made use of pillars, arcades and allegorical and mythical figures both on the grand triumphal arch and in the vestibules and other significant rooms inside the station. This was the only triumphal arch in Berlin's railroad architecture; for the most part they were built in the *Rundbogen* (round arch) style, as is most famously still visible in the ruin of the *Anhalter Bahnhof*. Its internal structure, like those other stations, was marked by the fact that it was clearly modeled on the design of other "higher" profane buildings of the period. The historicist construction of the *Lehrter Bahnhof* was doubtless a symbolic expression of the self-importance of the railroad company in its competition with others, but as a representation of the social order towards the end of the nineteenth century, it also spoke a clear language. It not only had the usual division of waiting rooms into first, second, third and fourth class, but it also had, at one end of the spectrum, a separate entrance and room for his majesty the Kaiser, and at the other, a room for those emigrants who were waiting for trains to take them to the international ports of Hamburg and Bremerhaven.

Aesthetic conflicts and demands marked the construction of the station. According to Krings, this architectural conflict was most evident in the juxtaposition of the decorated stone walls and the iron roof construction. The pressure imposed by the station's symbolic status found expression in other ways. The soon-to-be Kaiser insisted that the station frontage be situated parallel to the nearby Humboldt harbor. But that frontage itself, although resembling a giant portal arch, was in fact wholly decorative: on the right-hand corner a small sign had to be mounted pointing the way to the entrance for departures. In the original tradition of railroad stations, the *Lehrter Bahnhof* had one side for arrivals and another for departures, rather than the style that would develop whereby arrivals and departures took place through the same main entrance.

The fate of the *Lehrter Bahnhof*, from its completion in 1871 until its final demolition in 1959, is in many ways typical for the fate of railroad stations in general, and in Berlin in particular. For the "grand period" of the Berlin railroad stations, it was the site of historic events—Bismarck's departure from Berlin on leaving office in 1890, the arrival of revolting sailors from Kiel on 4 November 1918—as well as the point of arrival for state visits from 1905 onwards, right down to the arrival of Benito Mussolini on 29 September 1937, and Hitler's own return from Italy in May 1938 (Engel 348-52). It was also connected, in the public imagination, with the era of the "Schienenzeppelin" and the "Fliegender Hamburger," which traveled between the *Lehrter Bahnhof* and Hamburg as the swiftest passenger train in the world from 1933.

The *Lehrter Bahnhof* was also, like all other main railroad stations in Berlin, heavily bombed during World War II; its functional role, not its

symbolic value, made it a target. Nevertheless it was kept in use after the war, out of practical necessity as the population of Berlin undertook "Hamsterfahrten" ("hoarding trips") into the surrounding countryside in the so-called "Kartoffelzüge" ("potato trains"). Although on average 17 trains a day left the ruined station after 1945, like the rest of the railroad system in Berlin after World War II, the trains running from the *Lehrter Bahnhof* were under the administration of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn*, run from the Soviet Zone, and after 1949 the GDR (Engel, 354). The *Reichsbahn* closed down travel from the *Lehrter Bahnhof* in 1951. In the context of a traffic policy more directed towards automobiles than trains, the demolition of the *Lehrter Bahnhof*, begun in 1957 and completed in 1959, shows that in the immediate post-war context, the symbolic significance of railroad stations—whether ruined or still in use, like the station at the *Zoologischer Garten*—had sunk as low as it could possibly go (Stimmann 251). Reports of the demolition process in both 1957 and 1959 have a general tone of nostalgia for the "grand old times" of the station, though it is more the trips to the Baltic Coast than trains to the front, and the visits of statesmen other than Mussolini, which are recalled.³

The architects of railroad stations in the nineteenth century used historicist styles, as these were the dominant architectural language of the period, and also helped them to make sense of buildings whose functional needs were so radically new. In a different way, lines of tradition and continuity can be drawn for the period of planned rail renewal in Germany after 1990, and this will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

In Berlin after 1990, the railroad and railroad stations have become one referent for the past that can be invoked in thinking about the lines of continuity for the new capital because the stations are, unlike the airports, right at the heart of the city. The rhetoric of continuity within the context of rail travel is true not just of Berlin, as Helmut Kohl demonstrated in 1989:

Über den Ausbau der Eisenbahnstrecke Hannover-Berlin wird weiter verhandelt. Ich bin allerdings der Auffassung, daß dies zu wenig ist und daß wir [] uns einmal sehr grundsätzlich über die Verkehrs- und Eisenbahnlinien in der DDR und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland unterhalten müssen.

Vierzig Jahre Trennung bedeuten ja auch, daß sich die Verkehrswege zum Teil erheblich auseinanderentwickelt haben. Das gilt nicht nur für die Grenzübergänge, sondern beispielsweise auch für die traditionelle Linienführung der Verkehrswege in Mitteleuropa, für die Ost-West-Verbindungen. Es ist nicht einzusehen, weshalb die klassische Route Moskau-Warschau-Berlin-Paris, die ja immer über Köln führte und zu allen Zeiten große Bedeutung hatte, im Zeitalter schneller Züge [] nicht mit eingebracht werden sollte (13510-13514).⁴

³ See for example BM; Geisler.

⁴ "Discussions will continue about the development of the rail line between Hanover and Berlin. Nevertheless I am of the opinion that this is too little, and that we must have serious and fundamental discussions about the lines of traffic- and rail communication in the GDR and the Federal Republic. Forty years of division mean, of course, that the lines of

North-South, East-West (disregarding the economic benefits of air travel for the individual passenger at least) these axes meet in Berlin, and the *Pilzkonzzept* ("mushroom concept") which was devised for dealing with the expected increase in rail traffic had at its heart a new central station—not a terminal, but a site from which passengers could be directed around the city network (Remmert 6-11).

The lines of continuity express themselves in a number of ways with reference to the *Lehrter Bahnhof*. Although it might be thought that the *Lehrter Bahnhof* was a well-established station for the eighty years of its functioning, this is in fact not entirely the case. Berlin grew considerably between 1871 and 1900 when its population reached the two million mark, by which time the first plans for a radical restructuring of circulation in the city were underway. In a succession of plans from both Hermann Jansen and Martin Mächler in 1910 to the architects collective around Hans Scharoun in 1946, not to forget Albert Speer's plans for *Germania*, the *Lehrter Bahnhof* would have had to make way for the new rationalized rail structure that was to be established on the North-South axis through the city (Schmoll 24-42). That the site for the new station was the same one that had been considered time and again over the past century is less an indication of nostalgia for the grand old *Lehrter Bahnhof*, and more a sign of the obstinacy of Berlin's geography, the networks that have been laid over it in the past one hundred and forty years and the solutions that have been sought to address it. The site of the *Lehrter Bahnhof* lay empty for thirty years: its transport function had become increasingly irrelevant with the growing divide between east and west which had meant that Berlin was a political flashpoint, but that those sites near the border, later the wall, became economically redundant as they were disconnected from the circulation of people and commodities. The unification of Berlin suddenly placed these empty sites in its center at a premium, as multinational companies sought to reestablish circulation in Berlin and establish connections further east.

The auratic power of the *Reichstag* and the idea of *Potsdamer Platz* are relatively self-evident when compared to that of a railroad station at the end of the twentieth century. It is therefore highly significant that the project concerning the new central station dovetailed with the urgent need to revamp the state-run railroads, which in the West as the *Deutsche Bundesbahn*, were seen as a moribund loss-making state-run company, but which now had to take over an incomparably decrepit East German railroad system which had still

communication have, in part, developed without reference to one another. This is true not only of the border-crossing points, but, for example, also for the traditional routes for travel in Central Europe, and the connections between East and West. It is not clear to me why the classical route Moscow-Warsaw-Berlin-Paris, which always went via Cologne and had at all times a major significance, should not be brought into the discussion in an era of such swift trains."

been running under its pre-1933 name of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (Schwarz 377-420).

In 1994 the *Deutsche Bundesbahn* was privatized, under very different conditions from the disastrous return to the fragmentation of the nineteenth century as has occurred in Great Britain. It was not broken up into many different companies, nor was there the same distinction made as in Great Britain between Railtrack and the operating companies. Relevant for this chapter is the way in which the new head of the DB, Heinz Dürr, addressed the question posed more than 20 years before by the then head of the building construction division of the DB, Theodor Dirksmeier, whether the *Bundesbahn* should continue—as building history has shown—to create buildings as monuments, or whether it would not be more appropriate to look at a building as a commodity which, after having served its purpose, may disappear again without too much of an effort or expense and be replaced by a new and more up-to-date commodity (Müller 83).

Dürr established a new policy under the title the *Renaissance der Bahnhöfe* ("Renaissance of the Railroad Station"), also the title of an exhibition and catalogue. Behind the plan was not only an awareness that in post-war Germany the railroad station had been reduced to a bleak shelter for the marginalized members of society, but also acute financial acumen in the awareness that until now the railroad had been an extraterritorial area, out of reach of communal and regional planning. Under Dürr's new plan, not only would railroad stations be renewed, but also 90% of the land within cities currently owned by the railroad would be made available for building projects. The renaissance of the railroad station should, simultaneously, mean a renaissance of the urban environment in general (Dürr 13-15). In the exhibition catalogue, the contributions by architects and architectural historians circle around a number of key themes: a rejection of the "functional modernism" of railroad architecture since 1945, which has led to "architektonischer Profanisierung und ästhetischer Banalisierung"; a call to (re-)discover the "metaphysischen Moment im Wertestatus der Architektur" (Gerkan, "Renaissance" 27) and the "symbolische Ausstrahlung" (Weiss 264) of the railroad station; a need to understand and rework the traditions of railroad architecture; and a need to rediscover the railroad station as a central public space and as a location of circulation.⁵ There are projects going on throughout the East and West of Germany, but the *Lehrter Bahnhof* project is one of the largest-scale and also, given its location, most media-prominent, as it has taken on a symbolic significance for the New Berlin which no commentator has failed to mention.

5 "architectural profanity and aesthetic banality", "metaphysical moment in the status and worth of architecture": "symbol glow"

The Berlin Senate building director outlined the context for the project, stating that the plan for the railroad station also should include a plan for the surrounding city quarter. (Stimmann, 5-6). This is to say that the *Lehrter Bahnhof* project concerned the whole area between *Moabit* and the governmental quarter: this area was to be “mixed use,” i.e. offices, entertainment, and living quarters along with the railroad station. The representatives of the DB also proclaimed their eagerness to find a symbiosis between the conditions that derive from the station’s function as a rail terminus and as a commercial organization and the demands of establishing transport connections and the requirements of town planning. All investment that went beyond what was necessary to run the railroad station in its primary function would have to be planned, financed, built and run through private funding.

If the site itself denoted a line of continuity (if not quite in the way in which it was characterized in the press, which focused on photographs of the old *Lehrter Bahnhof*), then a further line of continuity is to be found in the building’s representative function. It was intended first and foremost to be representative of and for the *Deutsche Bundesbahn*. This was underlined in 1997. Another star architect, Oswald Matthias Ungers, had originally designed the plan for the mixed-use quarter around the station in 1994. In 1997, however, the *Bundesbahn* directors demanded that the 47 meter high hotel to the south of the station be made smaller and moved to another site, so that from the parliamentary quarter one could see Gerkan’s “glass railroad cathedral” and equally those in the railroad station (and in the *Bundesbahn* offices) could gaze upon the river and down to the Chancellery and further south to the other glass and steel structures at the center of Berlin, the *Reichstag* and *Potsdamer Platz* (Cb).

Such aesthetic considerations eventually gave way to the realization in 2000 that the *Bundesbahn* could not afford to pay for the building of the *Bügelbauten*, the two large office blocks which were to frame the long station hall. For the *Bundesbahn* itself, the decision not to build the *Bügelbauten* has had important and ironic consequences, demonstrating the interlinking of the circulation networks of transport and consumer goods. In his paeon to the work of Meinhard von Gerkan, the architect of the *Lehrter Bahnhof*, John Zukowsky argues that buildings for air transport and the new railroad stations have become the equivalent of cathedrals in our era, perhaps even more than skyscrapers, for the latter are representations of corporate or commercial ego as opposed to the new transport architecture, which “project the cosmopolitan image of the cities and nations that they serve” (20). The failure of this distinction to apply to the center of the new Berlin is demonstrated by the fact that the directors of the DB, who had hoped to be housed in the *Bügelbauten* above the *Lehrter Bahnhof*, have now taken up residence in the archetype of an

arrogantly homogenized Berlin, the glass Sony Tower, which now bears the discreet legend Bahn Tower.⁶

Whereas the *Lehrter Bahnhof* was to represent the position of the *Bundesbahn* on a par with the politicians in the governmental quarter and the multinational companies on *Potsdamer Platz* (Neumann), the representative quality of the architecture had a different meaning for the architect, Meinhard von Gerkan, and his associates. Gerkan, who wrote the major think piece for the *Renaissance der Bahnhöfe* exhibition volume, is a prominent member of that group of architects described by Brian Edwards in the following terms: "The new railroad age has ushered in the epoch of the universal designer-architects able to create memorable stations anywhere in the world. The station is an important building type within the classless, nationless global village of the future, and their designers are celebrated in increasingly ubiquitous professional journals" (181). Gerkan has designed numerous international airports and railroads stations, and his thoughts on the process of designing for transportation correspond to Edwards' assertion that the "design needs to reflect the values and image aspirations of the modern railroad age." In his writings, Gerkan argues "[the] level of mobility and with it the volume and density of traffic can be used as a direct indicator of progress, civilization and standard of living, although we are all aware of the disastrous implications caused through this mobility" (Gerkan, *Architecture* 14).⁷ "After a period of primacy of pure traffic management and road planning, which up to the present time has resulted in pure transport—space, without any regard for its further consequences, we have emerged into a more comprehensive view and everyone would now accept that 'transportation spaces' are not only seen as functional channels for the delivery of technical goods but above all 'living spaces.' [...] Railroad stations and airports are not simply dispatch facilities, but above all should be seen as major parts of our environment which have a clear right to be designated as 'environmental space'" (Gerkan, *Architecture* 16).

Gerkan argues that railroad stations are "ein Stück Kultur, und Kultur 'rechnet' sich nur gesellschaftlich, nicht ökonomisch." (Gerkan, "Renaissance" 52).⁸ The concept of *Kultur* has proved as changeable over the decades as the cultural significance of railroad stations, but behind Gerkan's thinking is the assumption that he, as an architect, creates environments that have positive effects on behavior, engendering a culture, as it were. In his plans for the railroad station itself, Gerkan stresses the importance of lived experience for

6 It now appears that private finance has been found, despite the massive oversupply of office space in Berlin, to build the *Bügelbauten*. See n.n. "Bürohäuser."

7 In these passages, transport and traffic are translations for *Verkehr*, which has these connotations of circulation also given expression in the loan word *Mobilität*—mobility Gerkan however also uses this mobility as a synonym for globalizing economic practices (12).

8 "a piece of culture, and culture 'pays its way' in social and not economic terms."

the space of the railroad station, highlighting such aspects as the public character of the railroad station; the lack of compulsion in the construction, i.e. the individual should be able to choose his own route through it (though this is in fact argued for as a better strategy for selling things); and the need for natural daylight and indeed sunlight (Gerkan, "Nördlich" 354-58). Gerkan's design for the *Lehrter Bahnhof* is largely steel and glass, which, as one of his engineers argues, is itself a conscious line of continuity. One can see "die geistige Herkunft dieser großen, rund 66 Meter weit gespannten und 400 Meter langen Bahnsteighalle. [Das] hoffentlich als schön und angemessene Dach sieht sich in der Tradition der großen Bahnsteighallen des letzten Jahrhunderts" (Schlaich 273).⁹ While there is no doubting the aesthetic preference for glass roofs and natural light over low ceilings and fluorescent tubes, it is the leap then to terms such as culture and democracy, which is less transparent. Both Gerkan and Edwards share the rhetoric of the railroad station as democratic, public space: "The station, with its democratic open structure, its public spaces inside and out, and its corridors of movement etched upon the face of the city, represents an important civilizing element" (Edwards 172). This rhetoric is joined by another discourse, that of the station as place of leisure: "The spectacle of travel, expressed both in mechanical forms of trains and in the human drama of rushing people, is an entertainment to many. Stations are part of the world of leisure: a resort for the urban tourist, the shopper and the unemployed" (Edwards 173).

It would seem, then, that the new railroad station as a piece of culture reflects cultural change, marking the shift of emphasis from production to consumption. What distinguished the railroad station in the past, according to Schivelbusch, was the circulation of people. As an architectural type, the railroad station belongs clearly and exclusively to the category of nineteenth-century steel and glass edifices that have been termed traffic buildings:

The "traffic" function found its architectural expression in a far more immediate way in the railroad station than it did in other types of steel and glass architecture. In market halls, exhibition pavilions, arcades and department stores the traffic of goods took place in a stationary fashion, in the form of storage and display, in the railroad station, the human traffic literally poured through, actively, in the form of travelers streaming in and out of the trains (Schivelbusch 172)

This is becoming secondary to its function as a site of consumption, a place from which to consume not only goods, but also the representative architecture of the district. This then is a third line of continuity (circulation), but with a strong sense of discontinuity as well. The train station is no longer primarily a gateway, despite Gerkan's argument that the station functions as a gate

⁹ "the intellectual heritage of this great railroad hall, 66 meters wide and 400 meters long. This roof, which will hopefully be seen as beautiful and appropriate, sees itself in the tradition of the grand railroad halls of the previous century"

between the parliamentary quarter and the marginalized quarter of *Moabit* ("Lehrter Bahnhof" 110). Gerkan's design for the *Lehrter Bahnhof* is a design for a specific kind of lived experience; it directs the traveler/ consumer/office worker towards certain forms of living. It is no longer a case of tracks in the city, but arcades in the station. It is a specific kind of public which inhabits that space, as was made clear in one of the few newspaper articles to describe the present space of the area around the future *Lehrter Bahnhof*. The journalist began with the following description:

Das künftige Bahnhofsviertel an der Invalidenstraße. Zu Fuß sind hier fast nur Bauarbeiter unterwegs. Der Verkehr übertönt den Lärm der Großbaustelle von *Lehrter Bahnhof* und Tiergartentunnel. An der Heidestraße, die am Humboldthafen nach Norden führt, befindet sich in einem Gebäude des ehemaligen Lehrter Güterbahnhofs ein Trödelmarkt. Mit Radiomusik, Skat und viel Bier schlagen die Verkäufer die Zeit tot. Gegenüber eine Imbißstube in waldgrünem Bretterverhau. Auf karierten Wachtuchern verbreiten Blumen fähle Gemütlichkeit. Nachts bieten Frauen an der Ausfallstraße ihre Körper an. Berliner «Umland» in Sichtweite des Reichstags.

Dieser Ode soll der neue *Lehrter Bahnhof* Leben einhauchen. Tor zur Stadt und Tor zur Welt—so kann die frühe Geschichte und die neue Utopie des Bahnhofs auf den Begriff gebracht werden. (Hillenkamp)¹⁰

This description is wonderful in the way the margins of Berlin are precisely the opposite of a sanitized consumer experience: the wooden shack, the unnecessary quantities of beer, the plastic tablecloths, the flea market, and the shabby prostitution. The renaissance of the railroad station appears to signify a civilizing influence, but by removing the obstinate bodies, it constructs a spatial practice which privileges the visual over the other senses, and therefore transmutes the sensual into a merely visual experience of phallically representative architecture. The transparency of the *Lehrter Bahnhof* and its new environs plays a major role in the sanitized re-construction of the urban imagination. They will enable the consumer to gaze in filtered natural daylight upon the other representative buildings at the center of Berlin, looking upon the steel and glass which conjure up the illusion of the transparency of the democratic process and the circulation of capital, where, as Henri Lefebvre observed, everything seems to be openly declared, but in fact there is very little to be said (49). The consumer will not be confronted with the "other side" of

10 "The future railroad district by the *Invalidenstraße*. Only construction workers move about on foot. The traffic drowns out the noise from the building site at the *Lehrter* Station and the tunnel through the *Tiergarten*. On the *Heidestraße* there is a flea market in one of the buildings of the former *Lehrter* Goods Station. The stallholders kill time by listening to the radio, playing cards and drinking lots of beer. Opposite is a snack bar in a green-painted wooden shack. On checkered tablecloths flowers create a sense of comfort. By night women on the nearby street offer their bodies. The 'margins of Berlin' within sight of the *Reichstag*. This desolate space should have life breathed into it by the new *Lehrter* Station. Gateway to the city, gateway to the world—in this way the early history and the new utopia of the station can be summed up."

urban reality. He or she will, however, be encouraged to forget that this other side has not simply disappeared; it has been moved to another, marginal space out of the line of sight. The new kind of railroad station envisaged by both the *Deutsche Bundesbahn* and architects such as Gerkan carries the rhetoric of democracy and transparency that marks Norman Foster's reworking of the *Reichstag*. When considering in what ways the new central station will be a representative piece of architecture, we should avoid confusing what we, as critical observers, consider that it represents with what it seeks to symbolize.

Whereas elsewhere the "Renaissance" philosophy of the *Bundesbahn* has to negotiate with already existing spatial practices, the new Central Station is located in a space that has had almost no practical function since the late 1950s. While Gerkan seeks to construct experience within his environments, the *Bundesbahn* has found it more complex when trying to impose its cultural renaissance on those spatial practices that are long established. This policy of "gentrification" of the railroad stations hit upon practical opposition, for example, the debate concerning *Deutsche Bundesbahn* boss Hartmut Mehdorn's plans for the *Bahnhofsmissionen* as detailed in a number of German newspapers in October of 2001. Mehdorn is keen to keep the homeless and drug-addicts away from his re-born railroad stations. In an interview with *Bild am Sonntag*, he said that homeless people were not "böartige Leute" ("evil people"), but they did not belong in railroad stations. For that reason he wanted to close down the points where food was provided to the homeless in the *Bahnhofsmissionen*. At the same time, Mehdorn also made the point that he had the feeling that the authorities "die Junkies am Bahnhof haben wollen, weil sie sie da auf einem Fleck haben" ("they want to have the junkies at the station, because then they have them all in one place"). According to Mehdorn, however, the stations were not responsible for the problems in Germany's towns and cities. (n.n., "Obdachlose" 96)

There is another side to this story, as represented by those who run and those who use the missions. The *FAZ* reported the perspective of Helga Fritz, who runs the mission at the infamous *Zoologischer Garten* station: "Herr Mehdorn vergißt, daß für viele Menschen der Bahnhof ein Stück Heimat bedeutet. Viele erleben hier ihre sozialen Kontakte, lieben den Trubel und all das. Der Bahnhof bleibt—auch wenn die Bahn privatisiert ist—ein öffentlicher Raum" (Pottharst).¹¹

In the nineteenth century, train travel was simultaneously a sign of revolutionary potential and a rigid class system, as Walter Benjamin recognized in his *Passagen-Werk*, for, whereas the car and airplane only carried small groups of passengers, the historical significance of the train lay in

11 "Mr Mehdorn has forgotten that for many people the railroad station means a piece of home territory. Many have their social contact here, love the hustle and bustle and all that. The railroad station remains, even if the railroads are privatized, a public space."

the fact that it was the last form of transport which allowed the formation of masses (744). In the twenty-first century, it might be thought that neither revolution nor the class system applies. Yet the transformation of public space into leisure spaces with a clearly-displayed *Hausordnung* ("set of house rules") cannot be divorced from certain rhetorical invocations of democracy that have also been applied to other glass buildings in this new quarter of the capital. In his governmental declaration from 10 November 1998, Gerhard Schröder suggested that the new Reichstag, with its glass cupola, could become a symbol "für die moderne Kommunikation einer staatsbürgerlichen Offenheit" ("for the modern communication forms of an open republic"), while Norman Foster suggested that "as night falls and the glass cupola glows, the building becomes a beacon, signaling the strength of the German democratic process" (Schulz 14). The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman sees the trend of development in Western democracies (of which the New Berlin is indeed intended to be representative) somewhat differently: "The growth of individual freedom may coincide with the growth of collective impotence in as far as the bridges between private and public life are dismantled" (2).

The railway station is still, potentially, a space where the public and the private might interact. But whereas nineteenth-century railroad stations cloaked their industrial origins and the process of circulation in stone, they now are designed to let the consumer gaze upon the circulation in a fashion similar to a visitor to the *Reichstag* or *Potsdamer Platz*; they aestheticize that circulation, but effectively offer an anesthetic to dull the pain of exclusion and impotence which the consumer/tourist/citizen might otherwise experience. The issue is not so much that railroad stations are being turned into "shopping centers with rail station attached." Railroad stations were always sites of commercial activity. To treat this as either the key point of attack or the point to be defended, as often happens in the catalogue volume to the *Renaissance der Bahnhöfe* and in the press discussion of the new station, is a red herring. It is more pertinent to consider the meanings generated by what is intended as a representative, public space in the new German capital.

The new Central Station being built at the center of Berlin thus not so much continues the "grand tradition" of the railroad stations, but brings up once more the complex issues concerning public space, representation, culture and power which have been associated with these buildings that are poised, in hybrid fashion, between function and representation. Railroad stations in the nineteenth century were decked out in allegorical figures, often allegories of motion and dynamism. While some new European railroad stations, notably Caltravas' station in Lyon, use animal imagery as an allegory of dynamism, it is in fact the steel and glass which the stone facades used to mask that have themselves become the bearers of allegorical significance. They seek to operate as allegories of democracy, transparent social relations and civilized public space. As with all allegories, however, there is a potentially fatal gap between

the signifier and what is alleged to be signified in an era when "the most powerful powers float or flow, and the most decisive decisions are taken in a space remote [...] even from the politically institutional public space" (Bauman 6). Klaus-Dieter Weiss has argued that in the future the railroad station will no longer be a station, but "doch *eine Stadt, oder ein Stadtviertel*" ("rather a town, or a town quarter") (265). If this is the case, then the steel and glass Berlin Central Station /*Lehrter Bahnhof*, with that peculiar trace of history remaining in its name, may be an all too representative symbol of the complex negotiations about the meaning of the modern metropolis and the nation state which are refracted at the heart of contemporary Berlin.

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